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THE FORMULAS OF MARCELLUS.

M. TÔCHON D'ANNECI, in his *Cachets Antiques des Médecins-oculistes*, or Dissertation upon the Greek inscription found upon a monument near Marseilles, IACONOC AYKION, (Paris, 1816, in 4to, p. 20,) gives several formulas or charms from Marcellus. The original work of Marcellus is entitled *De Medicamentis Empiricis, Physicis, et Rationalibus*, (Bâle, 1567, in fol.) published by Janus Cornarius; and contains a great number of recipes, not only those approved by physicians, but those recommended by the common people. It gives a just idea of the manner in which medicine was taught and practised in Gaul in the third century, when Marcellus lived—a country in which Irish (Gaelic) was still the language of the vulgar. For, as in *this* country the Irish language has survived the English invasion seven hundred years, so in Gaul it survived the Roman invasion at least three hundred. Knowing this to be the case—though too many Irishmen, I regret to say, do not know it—Dr. Jacob Grimm, the eminent German philologist, wrote a letter to the Royal Irish Academy, from Berlin, 20th June, 1855, of which the following is an extract:—

“Messieurs et honorés Confrères—Je pris, il y a quelques ans, la liberté d’attirer votre attention sur une mince découverte que je venais de faire. Il s’agissait de prouver qu’un médecin du temps de Théodose le grand, natif d’Aquitaine, avait inséré dans son ouvrage de médecine quelques formules jusqu’ici inexplicables, ou plutôt négligées, mais conçues dans un dialecte gaulois qui paraît avoir été très voisin de l’idiome irlandais. Ces formules constitueraient, donc, le monument le plus ancien de votre langage, et sembleraient dignes d’une étude particulière.”

Commenting on this letter, the President of the Royal Irish Academy, Dr. Todd, (14th March, 1856) observed, in his opening address:—“When our illustrious associate, Dr. Grimm, recently applied to us for information on a question of great interest respecting the ancient forms—or what he conjectures to have been ancient forms—of some Celtic dialect, he found us unable to reply.”—*Proceedings of the R.I.A. for the years 1855–6*, Vol. 6, Part 3.

Now this observation—let me say it with profound respect for Dr. Todd—is not very respectful to Dr. Grimm, who is perfectly capable of distinguishing between Celtic dialects,—Welsh and Irish, or Manx and Irish, &c. If the formulas were written in the dialects of the Welsh or Bretons, or anything like them, in that case Dr. Grimm would have applied to the Bretons or the Welsh. It is because he knows that the formulas of Marcellus are fundamentally Irish—(though as Marcellus lived in a *Basque* province, his Gaelic is by no means pure)—that Dr. Grimm applied to Irishmen. The prevalence of the Irish language in Gaul which Grimm indicates, may have originated in the wide-spread conquests of Hugony the Great (*Ugainé mór*) on the European continent, as described in the *Annals*

of the *Four Masters*. And let me here observe that either Irish history is worthy of respect (in such statements as this relative to Hugony), or it is worthy of contempt and neglect on that and all other subjects. But it cannot be at once authentic and fabulous. If the President of the Royal Irish Academy choose to believe in it, he can do so—if he choose to reject it, he can do so—but he cannot do both. He cannot suppose it at the same time to be all falsehood and all truth. It must be one or other, especially in facts of so important a nature as this of the conquest of Western Europe by *Ugainé mór*. If Irish annalists have coined this narrative,—if this be a fabrication of their imagination,—they are capable of inventing anything;—they are unworthy of all belief. On the other hand, if their other statements be true—if it be true, as they say, that the Irish conquered Scotland—(and the Gaels are there to this day to prove that they did)—it is equally true, as they say, that the Irish subdued Gaul. One fact is as well authenticated as the other; and I do not see how any man can reject the latter and believe the former. The formulas of Marcellus are as much Irish as the name of the river Garonne. (*Garbh-abhainn*). The people with whom the word Garonne originated were undoubtedly Gaelic; the people with whom the formulas of Marcellus originated were also Gaelic; that is, they were the same people. If they spoke Gaelic when naming their rivers, they spoke Irish when inventing their spells; therefore the formulas of Marcellus are not, as Dr. Todd supposes, “ancient forms of some Celtic dialect;” they are as completely Irish Gaelic as the words Garonne or Dublin, Shannon or Rhodanus, can be proved to be.

On this point there are two statements before the public—that of Irish history and that of English theory. Irish history and English theory bring the early inhabitants of this island equally from Asia. But the difference consists in this, that while the *Four Masters* bring the Gaels through the Mediterranean by a coasting voyage to Ireland, English theory brings them across the forests of Central Europe. Now these two statements are irreconcilable. At one time, indeed, the English theory was very plausible; but at that time geology had thrown no light on the terrible condition of the primæval forests of Europe. It had not investigated, ascertained, and described the prodigious *herbivora*, and still more monstrous *carnivora*, that roamed through those dismal shades. Those gigantic oxen and prodigious hyænas (such as Wilson describes in his *Pre-historic Annals of Scotland*) must have been of such a nature that every man would require to be a Guy, Earl of Warwick, in order to make his way through the woods. Even in our own day we see how slowly the well-armed Yankees cut their way through their own back-woods—a tedious process which has been described by De Tocqueville. We see, on the contrary, how easily islands are taken possession of even by naked Australasians. Tacitus assures us that all early migrations were maritime; and if Central Europe, in primitive times, was as impenetrable as Central Africa or Central America, in modern times, such must have been the case. In short, the Irish annalists make their ancestors do what was possible;—English theory makes them do what was impossible. The progress of the Gael by sea has always been westward; by land, always eastward. Thus Keating describes the Fir-bolgs (Belgæ) as being swept out of this country by the sword

of the Milesians, and swarming over England or Albion, settling in it universally. It is one of the curiosities of Irish history that we always find these two races, the Gael and the Belgæ, side by side. At this moment, in the Highlands of Scotland, we find the Campbells, who are Fir-bolgs, beside the Mac Donalds, who are Gaels. Cæsar finds the same thing in Gaul, and Keating describes the same thing in Ireland. The two races are always in proximity, but very seldom friends. The Belgæ or Fir-bolgs were repeatedly expelled from Ireland, and poured into Britain, as we find in Keating. But this was not all: the Milesians went after them and mastered them, as we find in the *Annals of the Four Masters*. The Milesian conquest of Ireland produced two consequences: 1st, a compulsory outpouring of the Fir-bolgs into England; 2nd, voluntary military expeditions of the Gaels, who followed and subjugated those fugitives, as we find in Cormac's *Glossary*. We find this conquering race (not their slaves the Fir-bolgs) going sword in hand into the heart of Europe under Hugony the Great, and imposing, not Belgic or Welsh, but Irish names upon the geographical phenomena of Central Europe. The very name of Europe indicates this fact, coming, as it does, from the Gaelic *oir*, the east, and *ib*, a country.

And here let us observe that wherever the Gaels obtained an ascendancy, as, for instance, in Ireland. "they imposed new names of their own, as they were enabled from time to time (in Ireland) to expel the old Belgic inhabitants."—[Vide Preface to *Ogygia vindicated* by Charles O'Connor, of Belanagare.] What they did in Ireland they likewise did in Albion or England, and in Gaul or France; i.e. they imposed such names as London (*long*, a ship, *dun*, a fortress) in the one country, and Garonne in the other.

Now if all this be true, it is very possible for an Irishman to translate the formulas of Marcellus, because they must be Gaelic. On the other hand, if all this be false, it will be impossible for him to translate those formulas, because they will be something else. Let us try.

One of the formulas of Marcellus is as follows:—*Tetune resonco bregan gresso*: these words were repeated three times in order to remove a mote or other foreign substance from the eye; the charmer who uttered the formula touching at the same time the eye of the patient. The following words were also used for the same purpose:—*In monderco marcos axatison*.

The first of these formulas may without difficulty be resolved into Irish words having an appropriate meaning. *Teith tuai nidh rosgach bregan gresach*—(literally) "fly thou evil thing of the eye mote common." The second may be resolved in like manner:—*In mo dhearc mairceas fag a (n) té sin*—(literally) "in my eye you have done injury, quit the member that." The first formula was uttered by the charmer, while touching the eye; the second by the patient while the eye was being touched. As might be expected, the language of all charms is obscure and mystical; but I offer the foregoing as an attempt, perhaps not altogether unsuccessful, to point out a method of disclosing their meaning. The words seem to be decidedly Gaelic in their origin, but to be disguised, as might be anticipated, by Latin terminations.

The preceding versions of Marcellus derive some confirmation from the following account of a charm formerly, and perhaps still, in actual use in Ireland, for which I am indebted to Nicholas O'Kearney, Esq.:—"The charm to remove a mote from the eye was thus performed. The charmer was furnished with a mug or noggin of clean spring water, and a clean bason or bowl. The operation commenced with prayer, as is usual in commencing all charms—a custom evidently introduced since the nation adopted the Christian faith, with the view, no doubt, of stamping on those superstitious remnants of pagan rites the seal of piety, and thereby making them acceptable to the people. Prayer ended, the operator took a sup of water, and muttered the following charm:—*Imthigh a dhorchagain, a dhorchagain thoirmeasgaich, o rosg* (naming the person for whom the charm was intended); *imthigh de sheideog agus tig inn mo bheal-sa*. The charmer thereupon spat the water into the empty vessel; and, after repeating the operation three times, carefully examined the water to find the mote. If the mote happened to be found, the sufferer was instantly relieved; but it sometimes happened that the charm had to be repeated before the mote could be removed. This sipping of water forcibly calls to mind the similarity of the mote charm with the Brahmin rites of the East, during very many of which water is sipped. There can be but little doubt that the charm given by Marcellus was used in the pagan ages, since it bears so close a resemblance to that just described, which I have myself seen performed hundreds of times."

In this modern charm of the Irish Gael, as in the ancient one of the continental Gael, the mote is apostrophised by the speaker and ordered to begone: *Imthigh, go thou, a dhorchagain, oh! darkener, a dhorchagain, oh! darkener, thoirmeasgaich, molesting, o rosg, from the eye of [such a one,] Imthigh, go, de sheideog, as a blast of wind, agus, and, tig, come, inn mo bheal-so, into my mouth here.*

To conclude. The passage of the Gaels and Fir-bolgs through central Europe in primæval times was impossible, and therefore the Gaels and Fir-bolgs did not make it. The passage of the Gaels by the Mediterranean and the ocean was (if Tacitus may be credited) perfectly possible, and therefore the Gaels—if they were originally Asiatics—certainly made it. Sooner or later our antiquaries will be forced to admit that Lhuyd was right when he stated that Celt was a mispronunciation of Gael, and that wherever Celt is mentioned Gael is meant. The Gaels are sometimes called Cymri; the Cymri are never called Gaels; that is, they are never called Celts by the ancient Greeks and Romans, but Belgæ in one instance and Attacots in another.

C. M. O'KEEFE.

[The curious subject, now opened by the writer of the foregoing paper, has been attracting notice of late among philologists in Germany and elsewhere. Dr. Joseph Grimm, in 1847, was the first to direct attention to the work of the old medical author, Marcellus; and, from an examination of its hitherto unintelligible formulas, to announce his conviction that the position of the old Gaulish language with regard to the two great branches of the Celtic (represented by the Irish and the Welsh)

was different from what was generally supposed. Zeuss, another German writer, some time after produced his remarkable work, the *Grammatica Celtica*, in which he brought together an extraordinary mass of information respecting the early forms of these two languages, deduced from a minute examination of some of the oldest MSS. known to exist in them. This work is not altogether free from errors; but, as a whole, it is the most important one ever produced on the Celtic languages, and exhibits an amount of patient industry which perhaps no one but a German philologist could apply to such a subject. Our Irish archæologists and linguists must be up and doing, unless they are content that foreigners should carry off all their laurels. We have ample materials within our reach, existing in our old vellum MSS., to set at rest many important questions respecting the ancient Celtic language, which are still undetermined: and we have the advantage of living in a country where several dialects of it are still spoken. But, with the exception of O'Donovan's excellent Irish Grammar (which is constantly quoted by continental philologists), nothing whatever has been produced in Ireland to compare with the works published in Germany on almost every branch of philology. We have reason to believe that we have amongst us men capable of emulating the labours of our German brethren. In the meantime, however, the work of Zeuss must continue to be the great authority on the old Celtic tongue.

Assisted by this guide, and applying the resources of his own acute mind, Grimm pursued still further his researches into the obscure language of Marcellus; and, during the last year, published a second treatise, in which he confirms his former statements. As the subject is almost unknown in this country, it may be interesting to our readers to give some account of the progress of the inquiry. The following are Grimm's words:—

“It is now eight years since I directed the attention of the Academy of Berlin to a work of a neglected philologist and antiquary, Marcellus, the private physician of Theodosius the Great,—entitled *De Medicamentis Empiricis* [On Quack Medicines]: and this with a double purpose in view. I wished to bring together the numerous traditionary and superstitious cure-formulas or charms contained in this book, and which we find at an early period extending, with a wonderful coincidence, over all Europe. And secondly, I endeavoured to establish the discovery that these passages in the work of Marcellus,—a Gaul born in Aquitaine,—were composed in a Celtic language. What were previously considered as unmeaning gossiping sayings, now proved to be the earliest monuments of the Gaulish tongue; preceding, by about three centuries, the oldest Irish MSS., and reaching back almost to the time of the remains of Ulphilas.”—“If we consider that, when the discovery of writing was once made, it would not readily be abandoned, and that in the ancient world the art was farther advanced than is generally supposed, we must regret that the more cultivated races, especially the Celtic and Teutonic, neglected to inscribe durable memorials on stone and metal, and thereby transmit to posterity more certain information regarding themselves and their languages. It is true that such monuments are more appropriate to Greek and Italian climates, where inscriptions hardly

become obliterated : still the Gauls, long before the commencement of our era, had possession of a large part of Upper Italy ; and their neighbours the Etruscans, the Umbrians, and the Romans, were well acquainted with the use of writing. But there is not a trace extant of a Gaulish inscription of so early a period, to give us insight into the condition of the Gaulish language at that time. We are at present able to understand the Oscan inscriptions almost completely ; and the Umbrian, about one-half or two-thirds :—even the riddle of the mysterious Etruscan will probably one day be resolved. Now, by means of the modern Celtic languages we should be able to explain the Gaulish as easily, or more easily, than we have been able to explore the Oscan and Umbrian with the help of Latin and Sanscrit.”—“Matters being in this position, it appears to be an acquisition of no small importance to obtain a specimen of the Celtic language as old at least as the fourth century after Christ, whose fixed phraseology points back to a still remoter time ; and to find it all but proved that the dialect of Aquitaine (the Gaulish language) must, on the whole, have approached nearer to the Irish than to the Welsh.”

Grimm’s announcement of this discovery at first met with little approbation. It was ridiculed in several publications ; and the opinion so strongly given by Zeuss, in his *Grammatica Celtica*, was quoted as decisive against him. The philologist Pott, writing on the subject, expresses himself thus :—“Zeuss, at the end of his preface, says, ‘Some people find pretended Celtic words in Marcellus, &c. I can find none.’—Such a sentence, coming from such a judge, is as good as annihilating, and in its regardless brevity is something terrible.”

Nothing daunted, however, Grimm pursued his investigations, and being joined in the inquiry by another eminent philologist, Pictet, of Geneva, (author of a well-known treatise on the affinity of the Celtic languages with the Sanscrit,) succeeded in explaining a considerable number of these formulas or charms “in a manner,” as Grimm remarks, “which leaves hardly any doubt of the correctness of the process.” The method adopted is the application of the Irish language, both ancient and modern, but especially the former, as the key to their meaning. Both Grimm and Pictet exhibit a great deal of ingenuity and considerable acquaintance with the forms (particularly the obsolete forms) of Irish words, and have succeeded in obtaining translations in every case, and these appropriate to the respective subjects, and, at the least, far from improbable. As a specimen of the method by which this result is attained, we give the following discussion of a formula from Marcellus, by Pictet.

Formula 12. —“He who shall labour often under the disease of watery (or blood-shot) eyes, let him pluck the herb *Millefolium* up by the roots, and of it make a hoop, and look through it, saying three times—*excicumacriosos* ; and let him as often move the hoop to his mouth, and spit through the middle of it ; and then plant the herb again.”

“I divide the formula thus : *exci cuma criosos* ; and I translate it ‘see the form of the girdle.’

“*Exci* may be explained in two ways without altering the meaning, *see* ! *Ex* may be the prefix or the preposition, which in ancient Irish had become *ess* or *es*, (now *eas*.) In *ess* the doubling of the

letter seems to arise from the assimilation of the guttural. The Gaulish form was certainly *ex*, identical with the Latin *ex*. [See Zeuss, *Grammatica Celtica*, pp. 57, 117, 865.] This is proved (amongst other examples) by *exacon* the name of the Centaury; being so called by the Gauls, according to Pliny, because 'omnia mala medicamenta potum e corpore *exigat* per alvum.' I compare *acon* with the Irish *aice*, *aiceachd*, the action of leading: *exacon* is the remedy that *leads out* from the body,—the purgative; an explanation which is simpler and more precise than the one proposed by Zeuss [p. 761.] We shall again meet with the preposition *ex* repeated several times in another of the formulas, No. 41. It is worthy of remark that the letter *x*, which is completely wanting in the modern Irish, is sometimes met with in the ancient Glosses of the MSS. of St. Gall and Wurtzburg, where it takes the place of the combination *es*: thus we have *foxlid*, ablativus, *forrozul tulit*, *dixnigur*, *appareo*, &c. [Zeuss, p. 80.] If, then, *ex* is truly the prefix, the second element *ci* (in *exci*) can only be the imperative of the Irish verb *cim* or *cighim*, I see.

"Besides this interpretation, which leaves the form *exci* intact, another offers itself in the Irish root *ec*, to see, of the words *ecet*, they saw, *ece*, *ecna*, *ecside*, manifest, clear, which is given by O'Reilly. As this root *ec* is evidently connected with the Sanscrit *īksh*, with the loss of the *s*, [compare *aksha* and *oc-ulus*,] we may even suspect that the *s* is still found in *exci*, where the *c* would then be redundant. *Exi* would thus correspond to the Sanscrit imperative. The formulas Nos. 18, 24, and 27, will afford us other examples of the imperative in *i*.

"*Cuma* is identically the Irish *cuma*, *cum*, form, model.

"*Criosos* can be nothing but a genitive of *crios*, *cris*, a girdle: and this form is very remarkable, because it offers a remnant of the Sanscrit genitive masculine in *śya*, which has disappeared completely from the Celtic languages. Even in the 7th and 8th centuries, in Irish, nouns ending in consonants already take merely the vowel *a* or *o* in the genitive singular. [Zeuss, p. 254.] The Irish *eris*, *crios* answers to the Sanscrit root *ḡlish* (originally *krsh*) to embrace, to bind, whence *ḡlēsha*, ligature, embrace. The complete theme of *crios*, then, would be *crioso*; and the genitive, *criosos*, the Sanscrit *ḡlēshasya*.

"The process of cure recommended in the formula is of a character altogether symbolical. Girdles, (*cris*,) which we shall meet with again in formula No. 27, seem to have performed an important part in Celtic medicine. [See the curious formula entitled *mochris*, from the MS. of Klosterneuburg, of the 11th or 12th century, which Zeuss has published and translated in his *Grammatica Celtica*, p. 933, and which is certainly older than the MS.] By making the eye look through the circle formed by the plant, a girdle, as it were, was put round it; and it is for this reason that the formula says 'see the form (or model) of the girdle.' The action of spitting afterwards through the little ring expressed symbolically the expulsion of the pain."——

The formula here discussed is comparatively simple; but others of a still more "barbaric" appearance have been attacked and resolved by these philologists with more or less success. As specimens

of the difficulties encountered, we may specify two of these, on which, to use Grimm's expression, "other inquirers may try their teeth."

Heilen prossaggeri uome sipolla na builet onodieni iden eliton ;
and *Xi exu cricone xu crigrionaisus scrisumicuelor exugri conexu grilun.*

Both of these are charms for anything sticking in the throat.

Pictet, in concluding his essay on the subject, makes the following observations :—" I may be in error, but it seems to me that these interpretations, so precise, so rational, obtained, like those of Grimm, without almost any alterations in the texts given by Marcellus, confirm in a remarkable manner the result announced by that learned man ; namely, the existence of a dialect of the Gaelic branch in Aquitaine in the 4th century : a result which is of the highest importance in the history of the Celtic languages. The analysis of these Gaelic texts, the oldest which we possess, exhibits the language still retaining some grammatical forms since lost, and which bring it closer to the primitive type, best preserved in the Sanscrit. It is highly probable that, if we had Celtic texts of the time of Cæsar, we should find still remaining in them the whole system of inflexions with their characteristic features."—

Whether the explanations of these formulas arrived at by Grimm and Pictet be correct or not, they certainly display a great amount of ingenuity ; and, coming from two individuals so highly distinguished as philologists, must be received with attention and respect by Irish scholars. We have no doubt, however, that much additional light might be thrown on the whole subject of "Charms and Spells," by collecting those still current in Ireland, both in Irish and English, but especially in the former language. We have had a number of them sent to us, and would recommend our correspondents in country districts to seek for and note down others, which they will find more or less abundant everywhere. The example now brought forward by Mr. O'Keeffe, in the preceding paper, is a good illustration of what may be done, and corroborates Grimm's remark respecting the wonderful coincidence in the traditionary formulas for curing diseases observable all over Europe.

If the unintelligible gibberish, which so often accompanies quack methods of cure, can be shown to be a corrupted remnant of a very ancient language, and that one our own Irish language in its early form, it will be an extremely curious and interesting result. The subject, as we may see from the remarks of Pictet, is by no means trifling or unimportant ; and, when properly viewed, it gives room for the exercise of much talent, and the application of much and varied learning. The specimen of a translation which we have given, shows what minute care is considered necessary by a modern philologist, in discussing an obscure question of the kind ; and which is very different from the style of treatment adopted by the old Vallancey school of writers in this country, whose hasty conclusions threw discredit on the study of Irish antiquities. A philologist now considers it necessary to give a reason for each step of his process, and is not ashamed to express doubts of his own correctness when he feels them.

We shall return to this curious subject hereafter.

EDIT.]